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REVIEW OF THE FUNCTIONING OF THE COMMISSION

The future role of the Commission for Social Development

Report of the Secretary-General

CONTENTS

	Paragraphs	Page
INTRODUCTION	1 - 7	3
THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE COMMISSION	8 - 54	5
A. Mandate, membership and frequency of sessions	8 - 18	5
B. Methods of work	19 - 40	7
C. Structure of the agenda and multi-year programme of work	41 - 54	11
Annex. OVERVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION: PAST AND PRESENT		
A. Mandate and terms of reference	1 - 2	16
B. Size, membership and frequency of meetings	3 - 8	16
C. Scope of the work and structure of the agenda	9 - 13	17

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CONTENTS (continued)

	Paragraphs	Page
D. Past experience in adapting to changing needs	14 - 34	18
1. Topics before the Commission	14 - 24	18
2. Functions and methods of work of the Commission	25 - 34	21
E. Current methods of work	35 - 53	23
1. Agenda	37 - 41	24
2. Inter-sessional expert groups	42 - 46	25
3. In-session working groups	47	26
4. Documentation	48 - 49	26
5. Reporting and guidance provided by the Commission	50 - 52	26
6. Role of the Secretariat	53	27

INTRODUCTION

1. The Commission for Social Development has been in existence from the very inception of the United Nations, advising the Economic and Social Council and Governments on a wide range of social policy issues and on the social perspective of development. Functioning under a broad mandate, the Commission for Social Development, formerly the Social Commission, has met at various intervals and at different locations during its 50 years of existence, with a membership that has varied in size and geographical composition. It has adapted its agenda and its methods of work periodically to enable it to provide, in changing circumstances, relevant expert advice to the Council, to multilateral funds and programmes supporting operational activities in the social field, and to Governments seeking technical guidance in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of national policy.

2. In chapter V of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, 1/ concerned with follow-up arrangements to the Summit, it is stated that the Economic and Social Council should be invited to review the mandate, agenda and composition of the Commission for Social Development, including considerations of the strengthening of the Commission, taking into account the need for synergy with other relevant commissions and conference follow-up (para. 95 (f)).

3. At its thirty-fourth session, which was held one month after the convening of the Summit, the Commission for Social Development considered as its priority subject the World Summit for Social Development. It adopted resolution 34/4 on the follow-up of the Summit, 2/ in the annex to which, inter alia, it referred to its central role in the follow-up of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, and recognized that it should be in a position to increase the value of its contributions to international cooperation and social development. To this end, the Commission proposed opening its debates to experts and the main actors of civil society in the field of social development; it also indicated that the Economic and Social Council should review the Commission's mandate, agenda and composition; and proposed a new structure for its agenda in order to reflect, at subsequent sessions, the changing global priorities of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action.

4. In its resolution 1995/60, the Economic and Social Council decided that the Commission for Social Development, as a functional commission of the Council, in promoting the integrated treatment of social development issues in the United Nations system, should review, on a periodic basis, issues related to the follow-up and implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, in a manner consistent with the functions and contributions of other relevant organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, and that, to that end, the Commission should:

(a) Improve international understanding of social development, including through exchanges of information and experiences, and through discussions on emerging issues;

(b) Make recommendations regarding social development to the Economic and Social Council;

(c) Elaborate practical measures aimed at furthering the recommendations of the World Summit for Social Development.

5. The General Assembly, in its resolution 50/161, decided that a revitalized Commission for Social Development, together with the Council and the Assembly itself, should constitute a three-tiered intergovernmental process in the follow-up to the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. It decided also to hold a special session in the year 2000 for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit and to consider further actions and initiatives. It called upon the Commission, as a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council with the primary responsibility for the follow-up to and review of the implementation of the Summit, to develop a multi-year programme of work to the year 2000, selecting specific themes and addressing them from an interrelated and integrated perspective, in a manner consistent with the functions and contributions of other relevant organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, and to present its recommendations to the Council, which should ensure harmonization between such a multi-year programme of work and those of other relevant functional commissions of the Council.

6. The Assembly also endorsed Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/60, and called upon the Commission, when developing its multi-year programme of work for the follow-up to the Summit:

(a) To adapt its mandate in order to ensure an integrated approach to social development;

(b) To integrate the current sectoral issues on its agenda in the multi-year programme;

(c) To review and update its methods of work and to make recommendations to ensure an effective follow-up to the Summit;

(d) To establish the practice of inviting experts to contribute to its work;

(e) To consider integrating into its work high-level representatives on social development issues and policies.

The Assembly requested the Commission to consider, in view of the scope of its work, the composition of the membership of the Commission and the frequency of its sessions and to make recommendations thereon to the Economic and Social Council. It also requested the Commission to establish the practice of involving the relevant actors of civil society in the field of social development to contribute to its work.

7. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General to present proposals to the Commission for Social Development and the Economic and Social Council for consideration at their next sessions, taking into account the experience gained

in other functional commissions, the Council and the International Labour Organization and at the Summit. The present report has been prepared in response to that request. It sets out options and possibilities for reform, grouped under a number of headings, dealing, respectively, with its mandate, membership and frequency of meetings, its methods of work and its agenda and multi-year programme of work. The annex to the present report provides an overview of the work of the Commission in the past and of its current concerns and methods of work.

THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE COMMISSION

A. Mandate, membership and frequency of sessions

1. Mandate

8. The range of issues considered by the Commission is wide and its mandate, as is evident from the annex, is very broad. Therefore no change in the Commission's formal mandate is required for it to assume the responsibilities envisaged for it by the Economic and Social Council in resolution 1995/60 and by the General Assembly in resolution 50/161, regarding the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development. At the same time, it would be helpful for the Commission's role in the follow-up to be explicitly reaffirmed, by a resolution or decision of the Economic and Social Council, or in some other appropriate manner, perhaps in connection with a formal endorsement by the Council of the Commission's multi-year programme of work to be elaborated at its present session. Analogous resolutions and decisions were adopted by the Commission on Population and Development and the Commission on the Status of Women in respect of the follow-up of the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995).

9. A further consideration is that the Council, in its resolution 1995/60, left open the precise manner in which the Commission would assist the Council in the intergovernmental review of the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action so as to ensure an integrated approach to social development.

10. Taking into account recent intergovernmental decisions on an integrated follow-up to major international conferences and the role of the Council in that respect, the Commission's main responsibility in the Copenhagen follow-up could be to assist the Council in organizing and coordinating substantive inputs from different entities of the United Nations system, as well as the contributions of other concerned functional commissions of the Council. As part of this effort, the Commission for Social Development could contribute specialized knowledge, organize contributions from other bodies of the United Nations in its traditional areas of competence, such as social integration, social policy and social welfare, and on the social dimension of other questions dealt with at the World Summit for Social Development, including poverty and productive employment. The Commission would bring together all relevant inputs and prepare a synthetic, coherent presentation for the Council's consideration, as the appropriate coordinating body.

11. *Points for decision:*

(a) The Commission may wish to consider the approach outlined in the previous paragraph to its responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action as part of a coordinated follow-up to United Nations conferences.

(b) The Commission may also wish to consider how to combine these responsibilities with its traditional functions of monitoring the implementation of various international instruments, some pertaining to social or population groups, others to social policy and social welfare, family, poverty and other social issues.

2. Membership

12. Both the Commission and the Council have given consideration in recent years to the possibility of enlarging the membership of the Commission. No specific conclusion has emerged from those deliberations. The present membership of the Commission has remained at 32 since 1966. All Member States are free to participate in the work of the Commission. While only members may vote, the Commission has for the past two decades or more taken all substantive decisions by consensus, with members and non-members taking part; on only one occasion during that period was a formal vote taken: in respect of the election of persons to serve on the Board of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. Moreover, according to the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Council, all Council members may sponsor resolutions in the Commission, whether members of the Commission or not. The most important formal right reserved to members is eligibility for election to the Bureau.

13. For purposes of comparison it is noted that during the past few years the Council has agreed to increase the membership of several of its functional commissions. The membership of the Commission on the Status of Women was increased from 32 to 45 in 1989 (Council resolution 1989/45); of the Commission on Human Rights, from 43 to 53 in 1990 (Council resolution 1990/48); and of the Commission on Population and Development, from 27 to 47 in 1995 (Council decision 1995/320).

14. *Point for decision:*

The Commission may wish to consider the question of the size of membership of the Commission.

3. Frequency and duration of sessions

15. Both the Commission and the Council have considered the frequency of the sessions of the Commission, now held every two years, without taking a formal position on the matter. The other functional commissions of the Council that are mandated to follow up the implementation of major United Nations conferences meet annually. Such annual meetings help to maintain the momentum generated by

those conferences. The General Assembly will also consider the implementation of the Summit on a regular basis.

16. *Point for decision:*

Bearing in mind the role envisaged by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly for the Commission in the follow-up of the World Summit for Social Development and the need for the Commission to contribute effectively to the monitoring of the implementation, follow-up and assessment of the outcome of the Summit, the Commission may consider recommending to the Council that it meet on an annual basis.

17. Regarding the duration of sessions, the present practice is to schedule eight working days per session. Sessions are scheduled to begin on either a Monday or a Wednesday and to end on the Wednesday or Friday of the following week. It would be useful to have a schedule that makes it possible to convene a meeting of the outgoing Bureau, or extended Bureau, just prior to the opening of the session, to discuss organizational matters and have an informal exchange of views on the conduct of the forthcoming session.

18. *Point for decision:*

The Commission may wish to recommend a fixed schedule for future meetings, beginning on a Wednesday and ending on the Friday of the following week; Commission sessions would normally take place during February.

B. Methods of work

1. Role of the Bureau

19. In accordance with the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council, the Chairman and other officers of the Commission are elected at the beginning of the session and serve until a new Bureau is elected at the next session. This arrangement ensures a measure of continuity from one session to another.

20. In respect of some commissions, for example the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Sustainable Development, it has been the practice to convene meetings of the Bureau between sessions to consider organizational matters and other issues relating to the preparation and the agenda of forthcoming sessions.

21. Regarding the practice of the Commission for Social Development in recent years, members of the Bureau have been entrusted with the responsibility of chairing ad hoc or informal working groups, normally meeting during the session. No meetings of the Bureau have been convened between the biennial sessions of the Commission.

22. *Point for decision:*

Consideration should be given to convening inter-sessional meetings of the Bureau to help prepare for the formal meetings of the Commission and to provide an opportunity for exchanging information between delegations and the Secretariat on the agenda and main themes of the session, as well as on the state of preparation of documentation and other matters of mutual concern, in particular the organization of work and timetable of the next session.

2. Organization of work and timetable

23. At present, the Secretariat prepares a draft provisional programme of work for the Commission, proposing a timetable for the consideration of the different items on the agenda. The Commission finalizes the programme of work at the opening meeting of each session.

24. Experience suggests that the participation of officials with substantive responsibility in government for specific issues before the Commission is particularly important. Such participation is contingent, to a significant extent, on the quality and timeliness of the preparations for the Commission and timely decisions on the scheduling of the different items to be considered by it. Timely decisions on the scheduling of in-session working groups, panels and other activities are especially important. In this connection, advance information on the timetable may facilitate participation.

25. *Point for decision:*

The Commission may wish to review the manner in which it decides how to organize its work and decide on its timetable, to give sufficient time for its members, observers and other participants to prepare for the session. One option would be for the Commission to entrust the Bureau, or an expanded Bureau, with the arrangements to be made, well in advance of each session, after appropriate consultations with the membership, subject to formal approval at the beginning of each session.

3. Role of representatives of the United Nations system

26. Specialized agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system, including the regional commissions, are entitled to be represented at meetings of the Commission and to participate in its deliberations with respect to items of concern to them; they are also eligible to submit proposals regarding such items. Based on recent experience from the preparatory process for major international conferences, including the World Summit for Social Development, the Commission's work would be enriched by being able to draw fully on the expertise of the United Nations system at both plenary and working group meetings.

27. *Point for decision:*

The Commission may wish to consider ways in which to ensure appropriate representation of the United Nations system and to encourage more intensive interaction between the Commission and representatives of the entities of the United Nations system on substantive matters. One possibility would be to organize formal panel sessions with invited representatives or to hold "hearings" on specific issues on which the Commission wishes to make recommendations. The Commission could also consider eliciting written submissions on specific topics in advance of its session and invite representatives of the entities of the United Nations system to participate, in an advisory capacity, in working groups on specific topics.

4. Role of NGO representatives and outside experts

28. The Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development stresses the important role, in partnership with government and the private sector, of organizations of civil society in policy discussions and in the implementation of the measures adopted by the Summit. At its thirty-fourth session, the Commission accordingly proposed opening its debates to experts and the main actors of civil society in the field of social development. This approach is also reflected in Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/60 and General Assembly resolution 50/161.

29. Non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council (category I or II) may attend, as observers, public meetings of the Commission, and the Commission may consult them directly or through committees established for that purpose. They have the right to have brief papers circulated during the session, through the Secretariat. Organizations on the Roster may also have representatives present at meetings and may also be heard at the request of the Commission. In accordance with Council decision 1996/208, NGOs accredited to the Summit but not having consultative status with the Economic and Social Council have been invited to participate as observers, on an exceptional basis, in the present session of the Commission.

30. The active participation of persons from and representing major groups of civil society would clearly add a valuable new dimension to the work of the Commission. The Commission may wish to consider, in the context of deciding on its long-term work programme, the specific roles and contributions of such participants in order to enhance the quality of its work and outputs. Consideration needs to be given also to the method of selecting such participants and the financial implications of inviting their participation.

31. *Point for decision:*

The Commission may wish to consider ways to enhance the contribution of NGOs and other actors of civil society to its work. The Commission could, for example, encourage the formation of NGO caucuses on subjects of special interest to the Commission and hear joint statements or presentations or receive written suggestions from them. The Commission could also consider inviting NGO representatives and other social actors to participate in

working groups, in order to make their expertise on specific topics available in the elaboration of texts or guidelines for subsequent submission to the Commission.

32. Several functional commissions have recently experimented with new forms of interaction between members and outside experts in the context of formal sessions or in the form of side-events. The Commission on Sustainable Development and the Commission on the Status of Women are among commissions that have experimented along these lines. The initial reaction of members has generally been positive.

33. *Point for decision:*

The Commission may consider the possibility of a dialogue with a panel of experts on the themes selected for each session. The panels could be chosen through consultations between the Secretariat and the Bureau of the Commission.

5. Expert groups and inter-sessional working groups

34. Inter-sessional expert meetings have provided a useful mechanism for ensuring in-depth preparation of priority topics for debate and action at the Commission, especially when it held its sessions only once every two years. Inter-sessional working groups have been convened on occasion under the auspices of the Commission for the purpose of preparing major events and texts or guidelines requiring extensive consultations and negotiations. If the Commission met annually, a more selective use of inter-sessional meetings might be appropriate.

35. *Point for decision:*

The Commission may wish to consider the possibility of inter-sessional meetings as and when a specific need arises for an intensive negotiating process or for securing expert advice.

6. In-session working groups and informal consultations

36. The Commission has made extensive use of in-session ad hoc, open-ended working groups to expedite its substantive work. It has also resorted to informal consultations during its sessions to resolve points at issue in draft resolutions, to reconcile different texts and to consolidate draft texts and requests for documentation.

37. *Point for decision:*

The Commission may wish to review its practice concerning in-session working groups and agree on criteria for convening such groups to deal only with priority questions. Informal consultations have proved very helpful in the past and the Commission may wish to continue to allocate time in its work schedule for this purpose.

7. Commission outputs: advice, decisions and resolutions

38. At recent sessions, the Commission has resorted with greater frequency to the elaboration of texts containing the Commission's analysis and recommendations on substantive issues, subsequently annexed to a resolution of the Commission, or a draft resolution for action by the Council, or, through the Council, the General Assembly. Recommendations on the agenda and core issues of the World Summit for Social Development, for example, were transmitted to the Council and the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit for Social Development in this format.

39. *Point for decision:*

The Commission may wish to expand this practice whenever possible to make its substantive recommendations.

8. Relationship with other functional commissions

40. In considering its agenda and multi-year programme of work, the Commission is requested by the General Assembly in resolution 50/161, to ensure harmonization between such a multi-year programme and those of other relevant functional commissions of the Council. The suggestions put forward below were drawn up bearing in mind the Assembly's request. The Secretariat will also continue to bring to the attention of the Commission actions and decisions relevant to its work taken by other functional commissions, including, for its special session, decisions regarding poverty made by the Commission on the Status of Women at its fortieth session. The Commission may wish, in turn, to consider how it could bring to the attention of other functional commissions its decisions and recommendations.

C. Structure of the agenda and multi-year programme of work

41. In its resolution 50/161, the General Assembly called upon all relevant organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system to be involved in the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development, and reaffirmed that the follow-up to the Summit would be undertaken on the basis of an integrated approach to social development and within the framework of a coordinated follow-up to and implementation of the results of the major international conferences in the economic, social and related fields. It also decided that the intergovernmental process for follow-up would comprise the General Assembly, through its role in policy formulation, the Economic and Social Council, through its role in overall guidance and coordination, in accordance with their respective roles under the Charter of the United Nations and with Assembly resolution 48/162, and a revitalized Commission for Social Development.

42. At its thirty-fourth session, in 1995, the Commission approved the provisional agenda for its thirty-fifth session, in 1997, which was subsequently endorsed by the Economic and Social Council. The provisional agenda for the thirty-fifth session is before the Commission in document E/CN.5/1996/L.2. At its present (special) session, the Commission is called upon to develop a

multi-year programme of work to the year 2000, selecting specific themes and addressing them from an interrelated and integrated perspective. In order to do so, the Commission may also wish to consider anew the structure of the agenda for its future sessions.

1. Structure of the agenda

43. As currently proposed, the Commission's agenda in future will contain two main items: (a) follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development; and (b) monitoring of other international plans and programmes of action. These two items would appear to be both comprehensive and flexible enough to enable the Commission to fulfil its major role in the follow-up to the Summit, to allow it to contribute to the coordinated follow-up to the other major international conferences in the economic and social fields, and to enable it to maintain its ongoing activities regarding specific social groups. The amount of time devoted by the Commission to any particular issue at any given session would be determined by the Commission itself, or its Bureau during inter-sessional periods, and reflected in the organization of work for that session.

44. The agenda item on follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development currently contains four sub-items: (a) implications of decisions and resolutions adopted by the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1995 and the General Assembly at its fiftieth session that relate to the Commission for Social Development; (b) priority subjects encompassing the core issues, commitments and related issues of the Summit; (c) review of the progress made in the implementation and follow-up of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, including reports of relevant bodies of the United Nations system, taking into account relevant decisions and resolutions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council; and (d) review of the world social situation.

45. It may be desirable to re-configure these four sub-items to make two. The first would be a combination of the review of the progress made in the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action and the review of the world social situation. Such a combined review, undertaken in discussions in plenary, could include reports of relevant bodies of the United Nations system, as well as of relevant programmes, specialized agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions, and it might also include periodic national reports, outlining successes, problems and obstacles, as suggested in paragraph 83 (j) of the Programme of Action. Discussions would benefit from the information provided in the Report on the World Social Situation and the related interim report. Progress achieved in the area of an enabling environment for social development might also be considered on a regular basis.

46. The second sub-item would be the priority subjects encompassing the core issues, commitments and related issues of the Summit. Discussions could be undertaken both in plenary and in working groups. Discussions in plenary could focus on issues of policy and substantive developments, in effect moving the international consideration of these issues forward from Copenhagen. Working groups could focus on technical aspects of the same priority subject, providing

an opportunity to exchange experiences, and to strengthen partnerships among Governments, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations in order to further develop and operationalize the suggestions contained in the relevant sections of the Programme of Action.

47. The sub-item on the implications of decisions and resolutions adopted by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly might best be taken up during discussions under the item on monitoring of other international plans and programmes of action. This item would then contain the Commission's ongoing work regarding specific social groups and allow it to contribute its views to discussions undertaken by other functional commissions, by the Economic and Social Council, particularly at its coordination and high-level segments, and by the General Assembly. The Commission's discussions could be held either in plenary or in working groups, at its discretion.

48. In accordance with various standing mandates or established practice, the Commission considers the following matters on a regular basis: (a) major issues and programme activities of the United Nations Secretariat and the regional commissions relating to social development and welfare and specific social groups - at each session (Commission resolution 30/2); 3/ (b) Quadrennial review of the International Plan of Action on Ageing (General Assembly resolution 37/51); (c) quinquennial review of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (when the review coincides with the year in which a Commission session is held) (General Assembly resolution 37/53); (d) proposed draft programme budget narrative for the biennium in question - at each session; (e) draft medium-term plan, or proposed revisions thereto - at each session, as relevant; (f) report of the Board of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development for the biennium - at each session; (g) nomination of members for election to the Board of UNRISD - at each session (Commission resolution 10 (XXV)). Topics (a), (b) and (c) above might best be considered in the future under the item on the monitoring of other international plans and programmes of action. Topics (d), (e), (f) and (g) might continue to be taken up under the item on other matters.

49. *Point for decision:*

The Commission may wish to approve the following structure for the agenda of future sessions:

Agenda item I: Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development

Sub-item A: Progress made in implementing the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action and review of the world social situation - discussion in plenary meetings

Sub-item B: Priority subject

1. Policy-level discussion in plenary meetings

2. Technical-level discussion in working group meetings

Agenda item II: Monitoring of other international plans and programmes of action

Sub-item A: Review of instruments pertaining to the situation of specific social groups (youth, older persons, disabled persons, the family)

Sub-item B: Contributions to discussions held by other intergovernmental bodies

2. Multi-year programme of work

50. The Commission would consider each of the sub-items of this proposed agenda at each of its sessions between 1997 and 2000. Issues for some of the sub-items, however, would be discussed on a rotating basis and not at every session. The precise pattern of rotation would depend on the decision regarding the frequency of sessions - whether annual or biennial. A basis for preparing a multi-year programme of work is suggested below. It takes into account the major tasks facing the Commission during the next several years, the major issues arising from the series of international conferences during the 1990s, and the precedents for establishing such multi-year programmes, and their substantive content, set by the Commission on Population and Development and the Commission on the Status of Women.

51. For agenda item I, the review of progress made in implementing the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action and the review of the world social situation would take place at each Commission session. The priority subject would be different at each session, but it should always reflect the multisectoral nature of the World Summit for Social Development by combining aspects of the three core issues. Some possible themes for this purpose are as follows:

Strengthening partnerships among government, civil society and the private sector for social development;

A broader recognition and understanding of work, employment and sustainable livelihoods;

Enhanced social protection and reduced vulnerability;

The enabling environment for social development.

52. For agenda item II, the Commission might choose to monitor the instruments pertaining to one or two of the social groups at any one session, on a rotating basis. Under this item, in 1997, the Commission will consider the following:

Disability: report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on progress achieved in implementing the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities;

Ageing: fourth quadrennial review of the International Plan of Action on Ageing and preparations for the International Year of Older Persons (1999).

53. The themes for subsequent years for agenda item II could be drawn from the following:

Ageing: preparations for the International Year of Older Persons (1999);

The family: five years after the International Year of the Family;

The situation of youth: five years after the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

54. The multi-year programme of work of the Commission would also have to schedule discussion of the outcome of high-level meetings, where organized by regional commissions, to review progress towards implementation of the outcome of the Summit. The Commission would also have to schedule a discussion on its contribution to the review of the outcome of the Summit, which will be undertaken by the General Assembly in 2000. It would be expected to contribute its views to the high-level and the coordination segments of the Council depending on the themes chosen as part of the Council's coordinated review of the outcome of United Nations conferences. Similarly, it might make contributions to the other functional commissions when issues of relevance appear on their agendas. Finally, the Commission would consider issues assigned to it by the Assembly and the Council, as they deem appropriate.

Notes

1/ Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995 (A/CONF.166/9), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

2/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1995, Supplement No. 4 (E/1995/24), chap. I, sect. E.

3/ Ibid., 1987, Supplement No. 7 (E/1987/20), chap. I, sect. D.

Annex

OVERVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION: PAST AND PRESENT

A. Mandate and terms of reference

1. The Commission for Social Development was established by the Economic and Social Council in resolution 10 (II) of 21 June 1946. Following a comprehensive reappraisal of the role of the Commission in 1961 and again in 1966, the Council, in resolution 1139 (XLI) of 29 July 1966, renamed the Commission in order to clarify its role as a preparatory and advisory body of the Council in the whole range of social development policy.

2. The terms of reference of the Commission for Social Development, as they have traditionally existed, are to:

(a) Advise the Council on social policies of a general character and give particular attention to policies designed to promote social progress, to the establishment of social objectives and programme priorities and social research in areas affecting social and economic development;

(b) Advise the Council on practical measures that may be needed in the social field, including questions of social welfare, community development, urbanization, housing and social defence;

(c) Advise the Council on measures needed for the coordination of activities in the social field and for the recording and exchange of experience among Governments in the formulation and execution of social development policies;

(d) Advise the Council on such international agreements and conventions on any of these matters, as may be required, and on their execution;

(e) Report to the Council on the extent to which the recommendations of the United Nations in the field of social policy are being carried out;

(f) Advise the Council also on vital social problems in respect of which action or recommendations may be required either by the Council itself or by the General Assembly in accordance with General Assembly resolution 2035 (XX) of 7 December 1965.

B. Size, membership and frequency of meetings

3. The membership of the Commission was originally 18. Membership was increased on two occasions: to 21 by Council resolution 845 I (XXXII) of 3 August 1961, and to 32, its current membership, by Council resolution 1147 (XLI) of 4 August 1966. The term of office of the members of the Commission is four years.

4. The Commission formally consists of one representative from each of 32 States Members of the United Nations elected by the Council on the basis of equitable geographical distribution according to the following pattern: (a) eight members from African States; (b) six members from Asian States; (c) four members from Eastern European States; (d) six members from Latin American and Caribbean States; and (e) eight members from Western European and other States.

5. In accordance with section IV of Council resolution 1139 (XLI), the Member States elected to the Commission should nominate candidates who hold key positions in the planning or execution of national social development policies or other persons qualified to discuss the formulation of social policies in more than one sector of development. With a view to securing a balanced representation in the various fields covered by the Commission, the Secretary-General has in the past consulted with the Governments concerned before the representatives are finally nominated by those Governments and confirmed by the Council.

6. The Commission met twice in 1947, once in 1948, twice in 1949, annually from 1950 to 1953, biennially from 1955 to 1961, annually from 1962 to 1963, biennially from 1963 to 1965, annually from 1966 to 1971, and biennially from 1973 to 1995. The present session is the Commission's first special session.

7. From its beginnings in 1947 until its twenty-sixth session, in 1979, the Commission met at United Nations Headquarters in New York. Between the twenty-seventh session, in 1981, and the thirty-third session, in 1993, the Commission held its meetings at the Vienna International Centre. The thirty-fourth session of the Commission was again held at Headquarters, where it is expected that future sessions will also be held.

8. In recent years, each session of the Commission has met for a total of eight working days. The Commission has adopted the practice of dividing its time between discussions held in plenary meetings and ad hoc working groups established to discuss certain issues of particular interest in greater depth. At its most recent session (the thirty-fourth), the Commission established three working groups: a Working Group of the Whole to deal with the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development; an Open-ended Working Group on the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond; and a Working Group on Monitoring the Implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.

C. Scope of the work and structure of the agenda

9. The workload of the Commission has increased steadily, especially since the late 1960s, with the growing emphasis within the United Nations on the social aspects of development, the attention given to specific social groups within society and the development process, and the need to ensure adequate monitoring of various international plans and programmes of action and follow-up to international events. The global events organized in the past 15 years, and their follow-up, have added significantly to the work of the Commission.

10. The agenda of the Commission, reflecting its broad terms of reference, is wide in scope. It has traditionally included items under which the Commission discusses social questions of a general character as well as more specific items of topical interest, which in recent years have generally been related to specific social groups. In the past, as interest focused on new specific areas of social concern, there was a corresponding increase in the number of separate agenda items or sub-items before the Commission. Following the adoption by the Economic and Social Council of resolution 1981/83, in which the Council, inter alia, instructed its subsidiary bodies to take urgent measures to streamline their agendas and programmes of work, the Commission adopted the practice of clustering various topics under a smaller number of separate agenda items.

11. Since the thirtieth session, in 1987, the Commission's agenda has contained three items under which substantive issues are discussed: (a) review of the world social situation; (b) monitoring of international plans and programmes of action; and (c) priority subject.

12. Following the World Summit for Social Development, the Commission, at its thirty-fourth session, proposed further changes in its agenda. The proposed new agenda, for the thirty-fifth session, in 1997, was endorsed by the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1995 (Council decision 1995/248). The agenda groups the Commission's substantive work under two main items, namely, "Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development" and "Monitoring of other international plans and programmes of action" (see E/CN.5/1996/L.2).

13. Even as the Commission expanded its agenda, over the years various topics and issues related to social development, which were initially its concern, have been "spun off" to other forums. A few examples of issues that were originally the subject of discussion in the Commission are: child welfare (the original Declaration on the Rights of the Child was discussed in the Commission as early as 1948); housing and town and country planning, during which the Commission considered the reports of the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning; and crime prevention, criminal justice and the treatment of offenders, on which subject a Committee on Crime Prevention and Control was established, which eventually evolved into the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.

D. Past experience in adapting to changing needs

1. Topics before the Commission

14. In the period prior to the establishment of the series of United Nations development decades, the Commission took action in each of the areas of its terms of reference. Acting upon General Assembly resolution 535 (VI) of 2 February 1952, in which the Assembly requested the Economic and Social Council to draw up a programme of practical action for the United Nations in the social field to be implemented in cooperation with the specialized agencies, the Commission developed a wide-ranging programme which included the matter of technical assistance to remedy social problems directly connected with economic development. The substantive topics that were included at one time or another on the Commission's agenda throughout this period were comprehensive:

background research basic to social policy and the collection and dissemination of information; health; housing and town and country planning; nutrition; education; labour; community organization and development; social security; social assistance and related measures concerned with income; family and child welfare; rehabilitation of the handicapped; social defence; training of social workers; migration and refugees; and emergency relief.

15. The Commission advised the Council on social questions of a general character by monitoring world social conditions. At its sixth session, in 1950, the Social Commission agreed that a trial international report on social conditions should be prepared, and at its session in 1952, the Commission considered the resultant preliminary report on the world social situation (E/CN.5/267), the first to describe comprehensively social conditions and the extent of social development in all parts of the world. The Report on the World Social Situation has continued to be prepared on a periodic basis by the Secretariat and submitted to the Commission for Social Development for discussion. The most recent report was submitted in 1993 and the next report is expected in 1997. Interim reports are also provided, so that the Commission can comment and provide guidance to the Secretariat during the preparation of the reports. The agenda sub-item on the review of the world social situation continues to figure prominently in the Commission's work.

16. As a result of its work in monitoring global social conditions, the Commission recognized the need for improved social statistics and information. At its tenth session, in 1955, the Commission considered the problem of international definition and measurement of standards and levels of living, and at its eleventh session, in 1957, it considered further work on information essential for social policy, including the development of social indicators. Twice during this period the Commission considered international surveys of programmes of social development, prepared especially for it. This review helped to establish a tradition in the Commission of considering national experience concerning social development programmes.

17. During the decade of the 1960s, the first United Nations Development Decade, the Commission continued to monitor global social conditions, identifying major obstacles to the attainment of social goals. Its focus also evolved to consider more complex issues of social development. It examined in a comprehensive manner the concept of an integrated or unified approach to economic and social planning, and extended the discussion to include consideration of the operational requirements of such an approach, particularly in the areas of planning and of information gathering, analysis and research. It also considered a number of issues of general importance to development, including land reform and income distribution.

18. During this period also, the Commission considered the relation of social development to other social phenomena, including urbanization and rural and urban regional development; the development of human resources; and social aspects of the process of industrialization. At the same time, the Commission continued to focus on long-standing issues, including social defence, family and child welfare, community development and various aspects of the provision of social services.

19. This period marked the beginning of the Commission's interest and involvement with the organization of major international events. At its seventeenth session, in 1966, the Commission considered proposals for an international Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Welfare, which was eventually held in 1968 - the first such international gathering and, as such, a distant precursor of the World Summit for Social Development. At its eighteenth session, in 1967, the Commission began work on a draft declaration on social development, which would, in general terms, define the objectives of social development and the methods and means of achieving them. At its nineteenth session, in 1968, the Commission completed its draft of the document, which was eventually adopted in 1969 by the General Assembly as the Declaration on Social Progress and Development (Assembly resolution 2542 (XXIV)).

20. During the Second United Nations Development Decade (the 1970s), the Commission identified, as a main task, the promotion of more adequate attention to social development issues at the international level, and re-emphasized the importance of social components of development, as expressed in the series of international conferences held during this period on such issues as the human environment, population, food, women, human settlements, and trade and development. These activities were seen as contributions to securing a balance between the economic and social aspects of development, and relevant to promoting a unified approach to development planning.

21. As part of its consideration of a unified approach, the Commission during this period introduced an analysis of economic and social development, which included both the national and the international levels and which sought to ensure that no important sectors of the population would fall outside the scope of change and development. It was the focus on this "social groups approach" which helped development planning to move beyond a sectoral approach, and which remains a primary concern of the Commission to the present day, as reflected in the item of its agenda on monitoring of international plans and programmes of action. Topics examined during the 1970s included the social situation of children and their protection and welfare; the situation of youth; the integration of women in development; the rehabilitation of disabled persons and their position in development; the welfare of migrant workers and their families; and the outflow of trained personnel from developing to developed countries. The Commission adopted a Declaration on the Rights of the Mentally Retarded in 1971, and in 1973 it took up the issue of a convention on adoption law, which began a lengthy discussion and resulted in the introduction, in 1979, of a draft declaration on social and legal principles relating to adoption and foster placement of children nationally and internationally. A version of the declaration was eventually adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 41/85.

22. The Commission continued to monitor the world social situation, including a review and appraisal of the Second United Nations Development Decade, and began to consider national experience with the implementation of the Declaration on Social Progress and Development. At the same time, it carried forward its review of social development issues of a general nature, including national experience in achieving far-reaching social and economic changes for the purpose of social progress; land reform; rural development; social aspects of nutrition; the distribution of national income; social policy and social welfare; technical

cooperation activities for social development; social research and training capabilities of developing countries; and crime prevention and control.

23. Throughout the Third United Nations Development Decade (the 1980s), the Commission continued to advise the Council on social questions of a general character, primarily on the implications of adverse world economic conditions for social progress, and to survey recent and prospective trends and fundamental changes in the field of socio-economic development. A primary focus continued to be given to national experience in achieving far-reaching social and economic changes for the purpose of social progress. Specific attention was given to issues concerning the equitable distribution of national income, popular participation and the process of institutional development.

24. At each of its sessions, the Commission continued to consider the situation of particular social groups, and the decade included a number of major international years and events with which the Commission was directly involved. Among these were the International Year of Disabled Persons (1981); the World Assembly on Ageing (1982); the International Youth Year (1985); and the Interregional Consultation on Developmental Social Welfare Policies and Programmes (1987). Through its discussions of the situation of particular social groups, the Commission was an early promoter of the idea of "social integration", which encouraged a focus on the relationships among various social actors and groups and moved away from welfarist approaches to social development towards the concept of "a society for all", in which tolerance for diversity and respect for differences are encouraged and the particular contributions of all members of society are recognized. These concepts were taken up as one of the core issues of the World Summit for Social Development and were eventually incorporated into the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action.

2. Functions and methods of work of the Commission

25. At various times of its existence, the Commission has shown awareness of the need to improve its methods of work.

26. In its early years, the Commission stressed the importance of establishing close coordination with other functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council. The Commission considered the desirability of setting up joint committees of several commissions: for example, a recommendation was made to establish an ad hoc technical committee to consider the question of migration, composed of members of the Social and Population Commissions.

27. In 1966, in response to the request of the Council contained in its resolution 1086 (XXXIX), the Commission undertook a reappraisal of its role and function and set out a long-term programme of work for the remainder of the decade. The reappraisal formed the basis for the decision of the Council to revise the terms of reference of the Commission, to change its name to the Commission for Social Development, and to increase its membership to 32.

28. In setting out its long-term (five-year) programme of work, the Commission divided its main activities into categories under a number of headings, taking into account the interrelationships among the various sections: (a) social

policy and research; (b) social planning; (c) social reform and institutional change; (d) social questions relating to major sectors of development - health, education, employment, nutrition, housing; (e) mobilization and development of human resources; and (f) social welfare programmes for families, communities and special groups.

29. At its twenty-second session, in 1971, the Commission established a detailed work programme for the period 1971-1975. This work programme divided the Commission's activities into three main categories: (a) social policy and planning; (b) social reform and institutional change; and (c) human resources and popular participation in development. Within each category, a large number of activities were set out, and a work schedule was established for each of the activities for the years 1971-1973, followed by a list of projected activities for the years 1974 and 1975.

30. During its twenty-fourth session, in 1975, the Commission reviewed the progress achieved during 1973 and 1974 in implementing its work programme, and set out programme objectives for the medium-term plan for the period 1976-1979. The Commission was of the opinion that there tended to be, as reflected in the organization of work, a polarization of activity into developmental and planning concerns on the one hand, and welfare concerns on the other. It was generally agreed that the programme of work lacked an essential focus, and the Commission emphasized that social development should be viewed as a holistic process. Such a critical problem as the elimination of poverty should be considered in this perspective.

31. The Commission, at its twenty-fifth session, in 1977, recommended to the Economic and Social Council the adoption of a draft resolution on reinforcing the social development sector within the United Nations, in which, inter alia, the Council would recommend that the Secretary-General appoint a small working group composed of experts from States members of the Commission for Social Development to study and to make appropriate recommendations for improvement with regard to: (a) the operational effectiveness of social development activities within the United Nations; (b) the effectiveness of existing United Nations coordination machinery with respect to such activities; and (c) the future role of the social development component within the United Nations with a view to strengthening the social development input in the preparation of a new development strategy. The draft resolution was adopted by the Council on 13 May 1977 (resolution 2079 (LXII)).

32. The issue of reinforcing the social development sector within the United Nations, including the role of the Commission for Social Development in that regard, was the subject of intense discussion at the Commission's twenty-sixth session. In discussing the role of the Commission, several delegations pointed to its unique function in considering the human factor in totality in the process of development. It was noted that while there were specialized agencies to look into such specific areas as education, employment or health, it was the function of the Commission to examine the social phenomena resulting from the interaction of the consequences of changes in those sectors with other societal phenomena. The need for a change in emphasis, with greater attention to more recent broad currents of thought on international economic relations and social development, was pointed out. However, it was also pointed out that, in order

to be effective, the Commission would necessarily have to confine its attention at each session to a small number of well-defined subjects, in contrast to the current practice. The Commission could provide a useful service to Governments by promoting the exchange of experience in social development so that countries might benefit from knowledge of alternative methods.

33. The Commission requested the Economic and Social Council to appoint an ad hoc working group and to have it report to the Council on ways and means of strengthening the social development sector within the United Nations.

34. The Ad Hoc Working Group on the Social Aspects of the Development Activities of the United Nations was established by the Council, and its report was submitted to the Commission for Social Development at its twenty-seventh session, in 1981 (E/1981/3). During the Commission's discussion of its own role and function, the view was expressed that there was a strong need for one commission to deal with all aspects of social progress and development, particularly in the light of the centrifugal tendencies within the United Nations system. According to its mandate, as enlarged in 1966, that was the function of the Commission for Social Development. The Commission should strengthen its input to the programming of specific social aspects of development in biennial and medium-term plans, and it should play a more active role in presenting to the Council and to the General Assembly, in an analytical and synthesizing way, inputs from other United Nations programmes, regional commissions and specialized agencies related to selected social issues of concern to Member States.

E. Current methods of work

35. By the late 1980s, the Commission's agenda had become increasingly complex, leading to a call to improve the work of the Commission and streamline its agenda. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1986/14, requested the Commission, inter alia, to consider, at its thirtieth session, specific proposals concerning ways and means of improving the work of the Commission. At its thirtieth session, in 1987, the Commission established an informal open-ended working group to consider the question. The working group held nine meetings, during which it discussed extensively and in detail the ways in which the Commission's work had been undertaken, the problems, difficulties and deficiencies, and possible ways of improving the work so that objectives could be achieved with greater efficiency and the results could have a real effect on the social development of countries. There was general agreement that social problems were vast and complex and that the time available at each session to discuss them was limited. There was, therefore, a need to rationalize the work of the Commission and to give greater attention to the elaboration of clear and pragmatic conclusions.

36. The Commission then adopted resolution 30/2 on the improvement of the work of the Commission for Social Development. The resolution addressed major concerns about the functioning of the Commission, inter alia, in the areas of its agenda, its substantive output and the frequency and length of its meetings. The Commission was of the view that the adoption of the resolution was a step in the right direction and that its decisions concerning its work could be refined

and improved at a later date, as experience was gained in the application of the new approaches.

1. Agenda

37. The Commission, in resolution 30/2, expressed the view that the priority for improving the agenda was to provide it with a more selective focus. A selective focus could best be achieved by limiting in-depth discussion by the Commission to a few carefully chosen subjects of particular relevance and importance that could be discussed efficiently and that were not dealt with in depth by other specialized intergovernmental forums. The agenda would be structured around a general debate, a limited number of themes for in-depth consideration and an item on the monitoring of plans and activities. Beginning with its thirty-first session, in 1989, the Commission began to operate according to this major restructuring of its work, reducing its substantive agenda to the three items mentioned previously: (a) review of the world social situation; (b) monitoring of international plans and programmes of action; and (c) priority subject.

38. The first item is a general review of the world social situation based on the quadrennial reports on the world social situation and concise interim reports updating them. The purpose would be to provide a broad survey of social trends and issues and to identify emerging concerns, to permit an examination of the implementation of the Declaration on Social Progress and Development and to present significant national experience in broad aspects of social development. The presentation of national reports should stress new approaches and methods adopted at the national level for the solution of social problems. It was considered that the discussion on this item might lead to recommendations on social problems meriting government attention and international cooperation.

39. The second item includes the monitoring activities of the Commission with regard to international plans and programmes of action, the results of international conferences, the work of the United Nations in the social development field and the work of autonomous institutes. The purpose of the work on this item is to exchange experience and provide guidance on the implementation of activities.

40. The third item comprises a few carefully chosen subjects, centring on significant issues of social development of common interest in all their aspects and emphasizing the policy measures that could be taken to deal with the problems, taking into account the special concerns of the developing countries. The purpose of the discussion is to lead to concrete recommendations by the Commission, as a specialized body, on how the issues could best be addressed by the international community. The issues selected are those whose immediate importance are recognized and should be relevant to the progress of social development in developing countries. They should be selected taking into account the subjects included in the Declaration on Social Progress and Development that were not dealt with in depth by other intergovernmental bodies.

41. Themes should be selected sufficiently in advance to permit the Secretariat to undertake the necessary research and analysis, including obtaining

information from Governments on national experience. Accordingly, themes for the sessions of the Commission during the period of each medium-term plan should, where possible, be identified in advance.

2. Inter-sessional expert groups

42. In resolution 30/2, the Commission suggested that, in preparing for the discussion of specific issues, use could be made of governmental and non-governmental expert advice in formulating possible recommendations. That advice could be obtained through the organization of ad hoc expert group meetings, which had customarily been used in implementing the social development programme, and linking them more closely to the agenda of the Commission. It was considered that Governments might offer to host particular expert meetings during inter-sessional periods, for the purpose of discussing issues connected to the themes selected for in-depth consideration at the next session of the Commission.

43. Between 1990 and 1992, three expert group meetings were organized in order to facilitate the preparation of discussions at the thirty-second and thirty-third sessions of the Commission. At its thirty-first session, in 1989, after extensive discussions, the Commission selected two priority subjects for consideration at its thirty-second session: the problem of the integration of young people into society; and the social impact of the critical economic environment on developing countries: strategies for social development cooperation.

44. In order to prepare for the in-depth consideration of these two priority subjects, two inter-sessional expert meetings were held. The Government of Spain hosted the International Symposium on the Integration of Young People into Society at Toledo, from 4 to 8 June 1990, while the Government of Finland hosted the Meeting of the Expert Group on the Social Impact of the Critical Economic Environment on Developing Countries: Strategies for Social Development Cooperation, at Järvenpää, from 17 to 21 September 1990. The reports of both these meetings were made available to the Commission at its thirty-second session, in 1991.

45. At its thirty-second session, the Commission decided to consider one priority subject at its thirty-third session: the social consequences of population growth and changing social conditions with particular emphasis on the family. An expert group meeting on the subject was held at Vienna from 21 to 25 September 1992 in order to prepare a report for consideration by the Commission at its thirty-third session, in 1993.

46. It should also be noted that, at the thirty-third session, in connection with the Commission's contribution to the preparations for the World Summit for Social Development, two Governments offered to host expert group meetings on subjects related to the core issues of the Summit. The Government of the Netherlands hosted the Expert Group on Social Integration, held at The Hague from 27 September to 1 October 1993, and the Government of Sweden hosted the Expert Group on Enhancing Productive Employment, held at Saltsjöbaden from 4 to 8 October 1993. The reports of both meetings were transmitted directly to the

Preparatory Committee for the Summit at its first substantive session, in February 1994.

3. In-session working groups

47. During recent sessions, the Commission has embraced the practice of establishing in-session working groups on individual agenda items of particular interest. This practice has been considered as one that encourages the preparation of concise conclusions and recommendations obtained by consensus. The results and conclusions of each working group are reported to the Commission in plenary meeting for approval, generally in the form of a chairman's text. At its most recent session (the thirty-fourth, in 1995), three in-session working groups were established: on the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development, on youth, and on the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.

4. Documentation

48. To complement the streamlining of the Commission's agenda, the Secretariat has achieved an overall reduction in both the number and the length of reports submitted for consideration. For example, at its twenty-ninth session, in 1985, the Commission had before it 23 pre-session documents and two conference room papers; by the thirty-fourth session, in 1995, the number of pre-session documents had been reduced to 12 and there were no conference room papers. The reduction in the number of documents derives partly from the streamlining of the agenda, which has reduced the number of issues currently before the Commission. It also results from the decision by the Commission to reduce the number of reports it receives, together with a decision by the Secretariat to combine several documents into one omnibus report.

49. Most of the reports received by the Commission are prepared to enable the Commission to properly consider the items on its agenda. Several of the reports before the Commission at any one session are reports that are mandated by decisions of either the Economic and Social Council or the General Assembly.

5. Reporting and guidance provided by the Commission

50. In resolution 30/2, the Commission also considered its substantive outputs. It was considered important for the Commission to rationalize the results of its sessions by making its conclusions and recommendations more precise and comprehensive. The fundamental task of the Commission is to provide advice to the Economic and Social Council and, in accordance with the rules of procedure, such advice could be embodied in resolutions adopted by the Commission on matters within its competence or else in draft resolutions recommended for adoption by the Council.

51. For those subjects within the competence of the Commission, the preferred method of providing advice is in the form of a Commission resolution. Those resolutions generally consist of texts that express the Commission's analysis of

a situation and set out its policy recommendations, including their rationale, which are presented in an annex. These texts are considered as guidance provided by the Commission in its role as a functional body of the Council.

52. For those subjects on which action by the Council is required, the Commission generally prepares draft resolutions for adoption by the Council. Such subjects often include those problems or policies whose nature and priority are such that they merit further discussion at the level of the Council, or input from other functional commissions.

6. Role of the Secretariat

53. The Secretariat provides substantive support to the Commission in the form of preparation of documentation, organization and substantive servicing of expert group meetings convened to prepare priority subjects for consideration by the Commission, and substantive support for inter-sessional or in-session ad hoc working groups. The Secretariat also provides technical support before, during and after the sessions of the Commission. As needed, the Secretariat provides regular liaison between the Commission and other functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council, and deals with inquiries and correspondence addressed to the Chairman when the Commission is not in session. These functions assumed special importance when the Commission held its meetings at Vienna and, for various practical reasons, there was no tradition of convening meetings of the Bureau between biennial sessions of the Commission.

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STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY

Policy and programme considerations in the formulation of integrated strategies for poverty eradication, meeting the basic human needs of all and promotion of self-reliance and community-based initiatives

Report of the Secretary-General

CONTENTS

	Paragraphs	Page
INTRODUCTION	1 - 3	3
I. FORMULATION OF INTEGRATED STRATEGIES	4 - 23	4
A. Main recommendations of the Copenhagen Programme of Action	4 - 7	4
B. Areas for policy development and further discussion	8 - 23	6
II. MEETING THE BASIC HUMAN NEEDS OF ALL	24 - 33	9
A. Main recommendations of the Copenhagen Programme of Action	24 - 26	9

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CONTENTS (continued)

		Paragraphs	Page
	B. Areas for policy development and further discussion	27 - 33	13
III.	PROMOTION OF SELF-RELIANCE AND COMMUNITY-BASED INITIATIVES	34 - 44	15
	A. Main recommendations of the Copenhagen Programme of Action	34 - 36	15
	B. Areas for policy development and further discussion	37 - 44	15
IV.	COORDINATED INTERNATIONAL ACTION IN SUPPORT OF NATIONAL AND LOCAL EFFORTS	45 - 58	17
	A. Main recommendations of the Copenhagen Programme of Action	45 - 46	17
	B. Areas for policy development and further discussion	47 - 58	18

INTRODUCTION

1. In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 1995/324, the Commission for Social Development, at its special session in 1996, will consider the substantive theme Strategies and actions for the eradication of poverty, with the sub-themes:

(a) Formulation of integrated strategies;

(b) Meeting the basic human needs of all;

(c) Promotion of self-reliance and community-based initiatives.

2. The Commission is to consider the theme of poverty with a view to making recommendations on how to implement pertinent recommendations of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development 1/ at the national and local levels, taking into account also supporting actions called for from the international community, mindful of the goals and objectives of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty (1996). 2/

3. In the present report, the main recommendations adopted by the Social Summit in regard to the above theme and sub-themes are recalled in summary form. Key areas that call for further policy development in order to assist implementation are indicated. Various options are outlined for consideration by public authorities and other social actors on which the Commission might wish to make suggestions and recommendations. They might constitute the substantive contribution of the Commission to the elaboration, by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, of a programme for the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006). 3/ It may be noted that the present report deals only with some dimensions of the outcome of the Social Summit with regard to poverty. Poverty is more than a problem of distribution, and needs to be tackled by more than redistributive policies and efficient social service provisioning. It is also - and fundamentally - a problem of exclusion from access to productive assets, resources and opportunities. Thus, the overall policy framework should be geared towards supporting increased, more effective and more equitable participation of all people in productive activities and ensuring more equitable distribution of the fruits of economic growth. This is particularly important during stabilization and adjustment periods, when concern with macroeconomic and fiscal equilibria tend to push social and equity concerns to the background. In particular, it may be noted that the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action recognize the importance of creating an enabling environment for poverty eradication, making livelihoods more sustainable and recognizing the role of civil society.

I. FORMULATION OF INTEGRATED STRATEGIES

A. Main recommendations of the Copenhagen Programme of Action

4. The main recommendations in chapter II of the Copenhagen Programme of Action, on integrated strategies, are set out in summary form below.

5. A central recommendation is that Governments should give greater attention to public efforts to eradicate absolute poverty and to reduce overall poverty substantially by:

(a) Promoting sustained economic growth, in the context of sustainable development, and social progress, requiring that growth be broadly based, offering equal opportunities to all people;

(b) Formulating or strengthening, preferably by 1996, and implementing national poverty eradication plans to address the structural causes of poverty, encompassing action on the local, national, subregional, regional and international levels. These plans should establish, within each national context, strategies and affordable time-bound goals and targets for the substantial reduction of overall poverty and the eradication of absolute poverty. In the context of national plans, particular attention should be given to employment creation as a means of eradicating poverty, giving appropriate consideration to health and education, assigning a higher priority to basic social services, generating household income, and promoting access to productive assets and economic opportunities;

(c) Elaborating, at the national level, the measurements, criteria and indicators for determining the extent and distribution of absolute poverty. Further, each country should develop a precise definition and assessment of absolute poverty, preferably by 1996;

(d) Establishing policies, objectives and measurable targets to enhance and broaden women's economic opportunities and their access to productive resources, particularly for women who have no source of income;

(e) Promoting effective enjoyment by all people of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, and access to existing social protection and public services, in particular through encouraging the ratification and ensuring the full implementation of relevant human rights instruments;

(f) Eliminating the injustice and obstacles that face women and encouraging and strengthening the participation of women in taking and implementing decisions and their access to productive resources and land ownership and their right to inherit goods.

6. Governments are urged to integrate goals and targets for combating poverty into overall economic and social policies and planning at the local, national and, where appropriate, regional levels by:

(a) Analysing policies and programmes, including those relating to macroeconomic stability, structural adjustment programmes, taxation,

investments, employment, markets and all relevant sectors of the economy, with respect to their impact on poverty and inequality, assessing their impact on family well-being and conditions and their gender implications, and adjusting them, as appropriate, to promote a more equitable distribution of productive assets, wealth, opportunities, income and services;

(b) Redesigning public investment policies that relate to infrastructure development, the management of natural resources and human resource development to benefit people living in poverty and to promote their compatibility with the long-term improvement of livelihoods;

(c) Ensuring that development policies benefit low-income communities and rural and agricultural development;

(d) Selecting, wherever possible, development schemes that do not displace local populations and designing an appropriate policy and legal framework to compensate the displaced for their losses, to help them to re-establish their livelihoods and to promote their recovery from social and cultural disruption;

(e) Designing and implementing environmental protection and resource management measures that take into account the needs of people living in poverty and of vulnerable groups, in accordance with Agenda 21 4/ and the various consensus agreements, conventions and programmes of action adopted in the framework of the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development;

(f) Establishing and strengthening, as appropriate, mechanisms for the coordination of efforts to combat poverty, in collaboration with civil society, including the private sector, and developing integrated intersectoral and intra-governmental responses for such purposes.

7. There is need periodically to monitor, assess and share information on the performance of poverty eradication plans, evaluate policies to combat poverty, and promote an understanding and awareness of poverty and its causes and consequences. This could be done, by Governments, inter alia, by:

(a) Developing, updating and disseminating specific and agreed gender-disaggregated indicators of poverty and vulnerability, including income, wealth, nutrition, physical and mental health, education, literacy, family conditions, unemployment, social exclusion and isolation, homelessness, landlessness and other factors, and indicators of the national and international causes underlying poverty; for this purpose, gathering comprehensive and comparable data, disaggregated by ethnicity, gender, disability, family status, language groupings, regions and economic and social sectors;

(b) Monitoring and assessing the achievement of goals and targets agreed to in international forums in the area of social development; evaluating, quantitatively and qualitatively, changes in poverty levels, the persistence of poverty and vulnerability to poverty, particularly concerning household income levels and access to resources and services; and assessing the effectiveness of poverty eradication strategies, based on the priorities and perceptions of households living in poverty and low-income communities;

(c) Strengthening international data collection and statistical systems to support countries in monitoring social development goals and encouraging the expansion of international databases to incorporate socially beneficial activities that are not included in available data, such as women's unremunerated work and contributions to society, the informal economy and sustainable livelihoods;

(d) Mobilizing public awareness, in particular through educational institutions, non-governmental organizations and the media, to enable society to prioritize the struggle against poverty, while focusing attention on progress or failure in the pursuit of defined goals and targets;

(e) Mobilizing the resources of universities and research institutions to improve the understanding of the causes of poverty and their solutions, the impact of structural adjustment measures on people living in poverty and the effectiveness of anti-poverty strategies and programmes; strengthening the capacity for social science research in developing countries; and integrating, as appropriate, the results of research into decision-making processes;

(f) Facilitating and promoting the exchange of knowledge and experience, especially among developing countries, through, inter alia, subregional and regional organizations.

B. Areas for policy development and further discussion

8. The Copenhagen Programme of Action provides a rich source of ideas and practical suggestions that might constitute elements of effective national strategies that would command the required political support at national level, in full recognition of both the diversity of country situations and the need for coherent, organized efforts, with a clear purpose. In developing further the orientation and objectives of national strategies, the Commission may wish to focus on the identification of characteristics of poverty which could be common to most countries, regardless of their definition of poverty and which could be used to measure progress; the identification of elements for elaborating national strategies comprising macroeconomic, structural, distributional and regulatory policies, together with specific short- and long-term objectives; and the further identification of specific international actions.

9. The design of an effective strategy from the catalogue of good practices listed in the Programme of Action requires difficult choices, particularly in countries where the population is in greatest need and where resources are typically most meagre. The capacities to prepare national plans for poverty eradication differ, and even in countries where those capacities are weak, the goals can be integrated and mainstreamed into national and local development plans and policy frameworks.

10. Given the multifaceted nature of poverty and its many specific causes and the wide range of possible policy interventions to combat it, responsibility in Governments tends to be diffused, horizontally and vertically. Taking stock of who is responsible for what and redrawing lines of responsibility, if necessary, can be a valuable contribution to the exercise of constructing a strategy.

Dialogue with the private sector and with representatives of civil society on their potential roles can further help to flesh out the programmatic components of a poverty strategy and provide a basis for decisions on the methods and revenue sources of financing specific investments and related recurrent costs of programmes implemented under the strategy.

11. The time-scale in designing strategies will be a major consideration. The adoption of intermediate targets within a longer-term framework has been found practical in some countries where, typically, the framework is periodically adjusted in the light of developments, but without losing sight of the long-term objective.

12. In the key areas of designing and constructing national poverty eradication strategies - setting priorities, assigning responsibilities and selecting a time-frame - the experience gained in different countries should be seen as an important international resource. Direct and frequent contacts among policy makers and officials for exchanging experience on such issues need to be facilitated.

13. In countries where a large proportion of the population lives at or close to the subsistence level, there is little practical difference between a strategy aimed at eradicating absolute poverty and one aimed at promoting the long-term development of the country. In such countries, it is easy to recognize absolute, or abject, poverty but difficult to measure its overall extent and what progress is being made in reducing or eliminating it. When half or more of the population at the lower end of the distribution are in very similar material circumstances and when individuals or families move in and out of poverty by dint of some random change in their situation (drought or flood, death or illness in the family, for example) a poverty-eradication strategy needs to focus on actions to raise the productivity, and hence incomes, of the mass of the population, over the long term.

14. The strategy will typically consist of a mix of efforts to enhance the human capital of individuals, with a special focus on girls and women, and to create economic opportunities in the community by appropriate macroeconomic and micro-economic policies, including facilitating access of the poor to resources such as credit. What the appropriate mix might be, and what macroeconomic policies are best suited to the country circumstances, will require close scrutiny. Appropriate attention to institutional development will also be important.

15. Giving a high priority to eradicating the most extreme forms of poverty by trying to reach the poorest of the poor raises not only practical questions of how it can be done in practice with limited resources, material and administrative but also difficult questions of social justice. A factor to consider is the identity of the very poor. In summary they are those whose ownership of assets or access to productive resources and whose capacity to participate in new opportunities is so low as to make it difficult for them to have the basic minimum of consumption and services required for a decent life. They may be the landless poor, artisans whose skills are not much in demand, isolated communities, indigenous people or those discriminated against and excluded; or, alternatively, they may be individuals unable to participate in

economic activity because of illness, disability or old age. In the case of the former, public policy, by example and specific programmes, may have a catalytic role. In the case of the latter, the emphasis may have to be placed on family and community efforts within the means available. How to apportion attention and scarce resources to the most disadvantaged while mobilizing resources to improve the situation of the much larger population in circumstances nearly as extreme will continue to be a critical challenge to the inventiveness of Governments and communities.

16. In some countries, levels of poverty tend to be more sharply defined. Here, one can distinguish anti-poverty strategies that are separate from, but complementary to, overall development policies. Focusing attention and concentrating resources on specific groups needing support can be expected to make a decisive impact, and significant numbers in the targeted groups can be expected to rise out of poverty.

17. In such countries, information on who is in poverty and why is likely to be more comprehensive and systematic. Setting a poverty line and targets for lifting people above it may be more readily used as practical tools of policy. But, even in these countries, there is often a lack of standard data to understand the full extent and nature of poverty, and progress made in dealing with it. Developing and using a variety of methods - including gender-sensitive methods - of gathering and interpreting information, of both a quantitative and qualitative kind, should be seen as a priority. One unconventional method is the use of community monitors to assess local trends and to communicate such information to regional and national assessors. Some countries have experimented with monitors with a degree of success; this practice might be considered for wider application.

18. Countries might also consider planning to bring within a comprehensive framework geared to national needs and capacities various ad hoc measures initiated at different times to deal with specific forms of poverty, through various public, private or charitable initiatives. Within such a framework, developmental programmes need to be designed and progressively implemented, aimed at enhancing the capacity of disadvantaged citizens - for example, disabled persons - to become economically and socially productive members of society. As new resources permit, other measures may also be considered - a support network or safety net for people not able to fend for themselves, for example. Experimentation is needed with different combinations of partnership between public and private sectors, government at different levels, and community and voluntary organizations. The exchange of experience gained and of lessons learned needs to be facilitated, at the national, regional and international levels.

19. A major group of countries - the countries in transition from a planned to a market economy - have seen a rapid increase in the number of people living in poverty. This reflects the dislocations in production and in the provision of free, publicly financed services and benefits, price reforms and the reduction or withdrawal of subsidies on a wide range of basic consumer goods. These in turn are the consequence of the change in economic and social philosophies and the break-up of integrated economic systems or, in some cases, of countries.

20. The nature and pace of rehabilitation of these economies and a resumption of economic growth will be central to coping with and reducing poverty over the medium term. The ability of countries to absorb excess workers still employed in unprofitable State enterprises into new economic activities, in large and small new private enterprises, will be crucial. In the long run, anti-poverty strategies will need to focus on refashioning the former system of social services, social benefits, State provisions and subsidies into a system of social services and social protection appropriate for a market-based economy, in partnership between the State, the private sector and an active civil society.

21. The phenomenon of continuing poverty in countries with a high level of income and well developed, often comprehensive, social services, benefits and provision poses specific policy challenges. In these countries poverty is best seen in relative terms. According to their own definitions of what constitutes absolute poverty, pockets of such poverty are not unknown and have risen in some countries in recent years.

22. Emerging high levels of unemployment concentrated in particular groups, especially among young people, unskilled or older workers and minorities, will require attention to prevent the emergence of major enclaves of entrenched unemployment and accompanying social dependence or poverty. The working poor are another major group requiring attention. These are often one-adult households, predominantly headed by women with dependent children, in low-wage, irregular or part-time work. A third category comprises those out of work and receiving social support, typically at a level below the official poverty line. A major challenge to Governments is how to achieve the twin goals of enabling welfare recipients to become independent through work and raising the incomes of low-wage earners, either through measures enhancing their productivity or social measures such as tax credits, minimum incomes or other forms of supplementing their purchasing power. A variety of approaches is being tried at national and local levels. They require evaluation and, in turn, the dissemination of lessons learned and problems encountered.

23. High-income countries have in the recent past decades successfully put in place policies to deal with traditional causes of poverty, such as unemployment, sickness, disability or loss of income in old age. The effective level of protection offered to such groups has been reduced in many instances, and future levels of provision are being challenged. To prevent the reappearance in the future of the traditional causes of poverty as major factors, strategies to eradicate poverty need to consider the long-term viability of present social schemes in a period of rapid demographic, social and economic change, and new avenues of reform need to be explored. Part of this re-appraisal should include re-examination of the respective roles of the public and private sectors, including both for-profit and voluntary.

II. MEETING THE BASIC HUMAN NEEDS OF ALL

A. Main recommendations of the Copenhagen Programme of Action

24. The Programme of Action stipulated that Governments, in partnership with all other development actors, in particular with people living in poverty and

their organizations, should cooperate to meet the basic human needs of all, including people living in poverty and vulnerable groups, by:

(a) Ensuring universal access to basic social services, with particular efforts to facilitate access by people living in poverty and vulnerable groups;

(b) Creating public awareness that the satisfaction of basic human needs is an essential element of poverty reduction; these needs are closely interrelated and comprise nutrition, health, water and sanitation, education, employment, housing and participation in cultural and social life;

(c) Ensuring full and equal access to social services, especially education, legal services and health-care services for women of all ages and children, recognizing the rights, duties and responsibilities of parents and other persons legally responsible for children, consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child;

(d) Ensuring that due priority is given and adequate resources made available, at the national, regional and international levels, to combat the threat to individual and public health posed by the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS globally and by the re-emergence of major diseases, such as tuberculosis, malaria, onchocerciasis (river blindness) and diarrhoeal diseases, in particular cholera;

(e) Taking particular actions to enhance the productive capacities of indigenous people, ensuring their full and equal access to social services and their participation in the elaboration and implementation of policies that affect their development, with full respect for their cultures, languages, traditions and forms of social organizations, as well as their own initiatives;

(f) Providing appropriate social services to enable vulnerable people and people living in poverty to improve their lives, to exercise their rights and to participate fully in all social, economic and political activities and to contribute to social and economic development;

(g) Recognizing that improving people's health is inseparably linked to a sound environment;

(h) Ensuring physical access to all basic social services for persons who are older, disabled or home-bound;

(i) Ensuring that people living in poverty have full and equal access to justice, including knowledge of their rights and, as appropriate, free legal assistance. The legal system should be made more sensitive and responsive to the needs and special circumstances of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in order to ensure a strong and independent administration of justice;

(j) Promoting full restorative services, in particular for those who require institutional care or are home-bound, and a comprehensive array of community-based, long-term care services for those facing loss of independence.

25. Governments should implement the commitments that have been made to meet the basic needs of all, with assistance from the international community, consistent with chapter V of the Programme of Action, including the following:

(a) By the year 2000, universal access to basic education and completion of primary education by at least 80 per cent of primary school-age children; closing the gender gap in primary and secondary school education by the year 2005; universal primary education in all countries before the year 2015;

(b) By the year 2000, life expectancy of not less than 60 years in any country;

(c) By the year 2000, reduction of mortality rates of infants and children under five years of age by one third of the 1990 level, or 50-70 per 1,000 live births, whichever is less; by the year 2015, achievement of an infant mortality rate below 35 per 1,000 live births and an under-five mortality rate below 45 per 1,000;

(d) By the year 2000, a reduction in maternal mortality by one half of the 1990 level; by the year 2015, a further reduction by one half;

(e) Achieving food security by ensuring a safe and nutritionally adequate food supply, at both the national and international levels, a reasonable degree of stability in the supply of food, and physical, social and economic access to enough food for all, while reaffirming that food should not be used as a tool for political pressure;

(f) By the year 2000, a reduction of severe and moderate malnutrition among children under five years of age to half of the 1990 level;

(g) By the year 2000, attainment by all peoples of the world of a level of health that will permit them to lead a socially and economically productive life, and to that end, ensuring primary health care for all;

(h) Making accessible through the primary health-care system reproductive health to all individuals of appropriate ages as soon as possible and no later than the year 2015, in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, 5/ and taking into account the reservations and declarations made at that Conference, especially those concerning the need for parental guidance and parental responsibility;

(i) Strengthening efforts and increasing commitments with the aim, by the year 2000, of reducing malaria mortality and morbidity by at least 20 per cent compared to 1995 levels in at least 75 per cent of affected countries, and reducing social and economic losses due to malaria in the developing countries, especially in Africa, where the overwhelming majority of both cases and deaths occur;

(j) By the year 2000, eradicating, eliminating or controlling major diseases constituting global health problems, in accordance with paragraph 6.12 of Agenda 21;

(k) Reducing the adult illiteracy rate - the appropriate age group to be determined in each country - to at least half its 1990 level, with an emphasis on female literacy; achieving universal access to quality education, with particular priority being given to primary and technical education and job training, combating illiteracy, and eliminating gender disparities in access to, retention in and support for education;

(l) Providing, on a sustainable basis, access to safe drinking water in sufficient quantities, and proper sanitation for all;

(m) Improving the availability of affordable and adequate shelter for all, in accordance with the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000; 6/

(n) Monitoring the implementation of those commitments at the highest appropriate level and considering the possibility of expediting their implementation through the dissemination of sufficient and accurate statistical data and appropriate indicators.

26. Access to social services for people living in poverty and vulnerable groups should be improved through:

(a) Facilitating access and improving the quality of education for people living in poverty by establishing schools in unserved areas, providing social services, such as meals and health care, as incentives for families in poverty to keep children in school, and improving the quality of schools in low-income communities;

(b) Expanding and improving opportunities for continuing education and training by means of public and private initiatives and non-formal education in order to improve opportunities for people living in poverty, including people with disabilities, and in order to develop the skills and knowledge that they need to better their conditions and livelihoods;

(c) Expanding and improving preschool education, both formal and non-formal, including through new learning technologies, radio and television, to overcome some of the disadvantages faced by young children growing up in poverty;

(d) Ensuring that people living in poverty and low-income communities have access to quality health care that provides primary health-care services, consistent with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, free of charge or at affordable rates;

(e) Promoting cooperation among government agencies, health-care workers, non-governmental organizations, women's organizations and other institutions of civil society in order to develop a comprehensive national strategy for improving reproductive health care and child health-care services and ensuring that people living in poverty have full access to those services, including, inter alia, education and services on family planning, safe motherhood and prenatal and postnatal care, and the benefits of breast-feeding, consistent with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development;

(f) Encouraging health-care workers to work in low-income communities and rural areas, and providing outreach services to make health care available to otherwise unserved areas, recognizing that investing in a primary health-care system that ensures prevention, treatment and rehabilitation for all individuals is an effective means of promoting social and economic development as well as broad participation in society.

B. Areas for policy development and further discussion

27. Meeting the basic human needs of all will directly improve the lives of large numbers of the poor and underserved. It also constitutes an investment which contributes to the long-term benefit of the economy and society.

28. In low-income countries where the basic needs of large numbers of people are not met and large segments of the population are not served by even the most rudimentary services, expanding the coverage of services will need to be the main priority. Even here, with few resources, clear criteria for selecting the sequencing of the expansion of services need to be established. Some services, or goals, serve multiple purposes or have significant secondary effects. Thus expansion of basic education will be high on the list of priorities, in particular the education of girls. Programmes targeted at women through health-care and nutrition programmes, for example, and programmes in favour of children have been found to produce particularly beneficial direct and secondary results. The situation will vary from country to country, and locality to locality, requiring flexibility in approaches.

29. In expanding services, adequate provision needs to be made for the maintenance of social infrastructure and meeting recurrent costs. Another consideration is the quality of services. How quickly expansion is possible so that the services will be sustained or the quality maintained is a matter of local judgement but always needs careful review. The cost of extending basic services tends to rise as one advances towards full coverage - for example, where services are extended to isolated communities or into sparsely populated areas, or because there is a need to provide for the support structure. As coverage expands, demand for an increased level of service or improved quality often follows, and the political and social implications of this must be kept in mind. For instance, a rapid increase in primary enrolment tends to increase the numbers wishing to continue into secondary education; or, once people are accustomed to basic health care, there is demand for more, and more sophisticated, provision. The challenge to Governments can be clearly seen from the experience of many countries where superior services coexist with an almost total absence of basic services in numerous communities.

30. The question of resources will inevitably loom large in decisions about the possible rates of expanding and improving services. One common feature among recent success stories from different regions has been the commitment of their Governments to invest relatively large amounts in basic social services. The extent to which users, especially poor persons, should bear some of the cost of these services is problematic. User charges have both practical advantages and disadvantages. The dilemma can be best summarized thus: user fees can increase the resources available for expanding services or improving their quality -

although their contribution to fiscal revenue is very limited - while at the same time limiting access to them for many individuals - the poor, in particular. Recent experimentation has been along the lines of a mix of charges or fees and free or subsidized provision of particular categories of basic services to specific segments of the population. These matters can be resolved only in the light of a given situation on the ground and pragmatically, assisted by some broad overall guidelines that may be distilled from experience in a variety of situations.

31. The focus needs to be kept on the goal of reaching universal coverage of basic services, while considering longer-term needs for improving and maintaining quality. Countries may also find it useful to review periodically the administrative arrangements for the provision of services, including the allocation of responsibilities among entities of government and at different levels, the need for horizontal and vertical coordination as systems become more complex, and sources of finance. In many countries there will be a dual or parallel system of public and private provision. The balance between public and private provision, various forms of partnerships in the delivery of services, and the role of voluntary and community-based provision needs review and periodic adjustment, based on experience and emerging needs.

32. Countries in transition face very particular problems. Having already achieved in essence universal coverage and met basic human needs, they are now having to deal, in many cases, with the disintegration or partial disintegration of services and benefit systems. Improvisation has been the order of the day, and some programmes and beneficiaries have fared better than others. The basic task now is to re-establish a system of provision appropriate to the new basis of organizing the economy and put in place the appropriate legal basis and administrative structures, explore and formalize partnership options for cooperation between public and private sectors and modernize legal structures for the functioning and growth of organizations of civil society.

33. In higher-income countries there remain communities that are underserved, contrasting with the typically high quality of provision. One major challenge is to retain the already achieved coverage and quality in the face of new resource constraints and obvious weaknesses of some of the programmes in the contemporary setting. The political and professional debate has in recent years focused, and is likely to continue to focus, on a number of major questions: the relationship between a high level of social provision and individual incentives to work and national competitiveness; the extent to which individual and family responsibility might be undermined by social provision; the relative efficiency of public and private provision and of various mixes of the two; how to divide responsibility among different levels of government; and how to keep costs in check. A particular issue in the wake of regional integration that is likely to assume greater importance in the future is the cross-national harmonization of provision and portability across frontiers of entitlements.

III. PROMOTION OF SELF-RELIANCE AND COMMUNITY-BASED INITIATIVES

A. Main recommendations of the Copenhagen Programme of Action

34. The Programme of Action stresses the importance of identifying the livelihood systems, survival strategies and self-help organizations of people living in poverty and working with such organizations to develop programmes for combating poverty that build on their efforts, ensuring the full participation of the people concerned and responding to their actual needs.

35. It calls for encouraging and supporting local community development projects that foster the skill, self-reliance and self-confidence of people living in poverty and that facilitate their active participation in efforts to eradicate poverty.

36. People living in poverty and their organizations should be empowered by:

(a) Involving them fully in the setting of targets and in the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of national strategies and programmes for poverty eradication and community-based development, and ensuring that such programmes reflect their priorities;

(b) Integrating gender concerns in the planning and implementation of policies and programmes for the empowerment of women;

(c) Ensuring that policies and programmes affecting people living in poverty respect their dignity and culture and make full use of their knowledge, skills and resourcefulness;

(d) Strengthening education at all levels and ensuring the access to education of people living in poverty, in particular their access to primary education and other basic education opportunities;

(e) Encouraging and assisting people living in poverty to organize so that their representatives can participate in economic and social policy-making and work more effectively with governmental, non-governmental and other relevant institutions to obtain the services and opportunities they need;

(f) Placing special emphasis on capacity-building and community-based management;

(g) Educating people about their rights, the political system and the availability of programmes.

B. Areas for policy development and further discussion

37. In the past decade there has been a noticeable shift of opinion in attitudes to people living in poverty, seeing them as people possessing skills, knowledge and resources, often with well-developed survival strategies. The hidden resources possessed by people living in poverty, if fostered, encouraged

and activated, can be a major force in raising individuals and communities out of poverty.

38. Self-help or community-based efforts have been the traditional basis of economic and social organization among subsistence and low-income populations and thus continue to be important in the survival strategies of millions of people. A mass of detailed research in recent years has revealed a rich fabric of support networks and mutual or community-based initiatives to deal with everyday problems of economic survival and social functioning. Improved, low-cost, information exchange, travel and networking opportunities, local activism to protect the rights of local citizens confronting externally imposed development projects, and government-supported community activism and mobilization for local development have given a new dynamism to such efforts.

39. Experience of several decades of development planning and practice has also demonstrated that successful implementation often depends on building partnerships involving all elements in society that will be affected or may be expected to benefit or contribute to a development activity. In particular, the knowledge of intended beneficiaries, however poor or apparently unskilled, has, where sought, made a significant contribution to the success of many undertakings and - when not sought - to the failure of others.

40. The challenge for Governments now is to build on measures that have succeeded, to foster, encourage and assist the growth of such self-reliant and community-based initiatives and to do so without wielding a heavy bureaucratic hand or micro-managing. Options that need to be explored in different settings include: the establishment of a clear legal and institutional framework, for example, for the functioning of cooperatives or mutual-aid societies; dissemination of information; creation of institutional mechanisms to mediate between government and citizens or community groups for the transmittal and exchange of information and provision of training materials; facilitating networking within countries and with related international umbrella organizations; and creating mechanisms for the funnelling of micro-scale grants and other forms of seed money.

41. In many countries, self-reliant and community-based initiatives have in the past shown exceptional dynamism. Initiatives from many different groups in society have proliferated: environmentalists, peasant groups, slum dwellers and indigenous people are notable examples. The key issues from a public policy perspective will be how to bring coherence to these disparate initiatives so that they can focus efforts on priorities at the regional and national levels and how best to develop partnerships between community-based and public authority efforts without stifling the spontaneity, energy and capacity for innovation of the poor.

42. Countries in transition, where such community-based efforts had not been especially encouraged - or have been discouraged - are experiencing a partial renaissance in voluntarism and self-help, often organized around church activities or supported by emigrant communities around the world. Public policy will need to concern itself with the creation of appropriate legal frameworks for such activities and the organization of practical support, including information, networking and opportunities for international exchanges.

43. In higher-income countries organizations of civil society, including voluntary and charitable institutions, are very active and attract money and members in very impressive numbers, in spite of the rapid growth of State programmes, services and benefits covering a wide range of needs. In the past decade, the most dynamic growth has been in the mutual-help, support-group and self-advocacy type of grouping, often loosely organized and often without formal status. The more traditional, service-to-others, structured voluntary organizations have fared less well and have encountered difficulty in attracting additional donations and private contributions to expand or maintain their level of activity.

44. An important policy question in many countries concerns the future role of different forms of community-initiated programmes, particularly their relationship with established, organized voluntary or charitable organizations, their role in delivering publicly financed services, and, on the one hand, the compatibility of their advocacy role in support of the poor and disadvantaged, and on the other, their role as partners in developing and implementing public policy.

IV. COORDINATED INTERNATIONAL ACTION IN SUPPORT OF NATIONAL AND LOCAL EFFORTS

A. Main recommendations of the Copenhagen Programme of Action

45. Social development and the implementation of the Programme of Action, including the provisions relating specifically to the goal of eradicating poverty, are primarily the responsibility of Governments, although international cooperation and assistance are essential. The Programme of Action, in this context, sets out a number of recommendations concerning the mobilization of financial resources, including external resources, and the appropriate contribution of the United Nations system. Important recommendations to this effect are also set out in chapter I, on an enabling environment for social development.

46. Specifically in relation to poverty eradication, the Programme of Action stipulates that members of the international community should, bilaterally or through multilateral organizations, foster an enabling environment by:

(a) Coordinating policies and programmes to support the measures being taken in the developing countries, particularly in Africa and the least developed countries, to eradicate poverty, provide remunerative work and strengthen social integration in order to meet basic social development goals and targets;

(b) Promoting international cooperation to assist developing countries, at their request, in their efforts, in particular at the community level, towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women;

(c) Strengthening the capacities of developing countries to monitor the progress of national poverty eradication plans and to assess the impact of

national and international policies and programmes on people living in poverty and address their negative impacts;

(d) Strengthening the capacity of countries with economies in transition to develop their social protection systems and social policies for, inter alia, the reduction of poverty;

(e) Addressing the special needs of small island developing States with respect to eradicating poverty and meeting poverty eradication goals and targets, within the context of social development programmes that reflect their national priorities;

(f) Addressing the problems faced by the land-locked developing countries in eradicating poverty and supporting their efforts aimed at social development;

(g) Supporting societies disrupted by conflict in their efforts to rebuild their social protection systems and eradicate poverty;

(h) Strengthening and improving financial and technical assistance for community-based development and self-help programmes and strengthening cooperation among Governments, community organizations, cooperatives, formal and informal banking institutions, private enterprises and international agencies, with the aim of mobilizing local savings, promoting the creation of local financial networks, and increasing the availability of credit and market information to small entrepreneurs, small farmers and other low-income self-employed workers, with particular efforts to ensure the availability of such services to women.

B. Areas for policy development and further discussion

47. International development assistance is, in principle, directed to poverty eradication or alleviation, either by raising the average level of living of countries or improving the circumstances of specific groups living in poverty, or both.

48. The traditional North/South flow of both financial or material resources and knowledge or skills has more recently been broadened as it has come to be realized that the most suitable knowledge, skills, know-how and technical expertise were not necessarily to be found in the high-income countries. International cooperation is now more an exchange of specific expertise and experience among countries, irrespective of their overall levels of material development. Financial resources are also more diversified by source but continue to be mobilized predominantly in developed countries.

49. The first area of policy that needs to be discussed is the flow of assistance for anti-poverty and related social development programmes. There are many difficulties in measuring the precise flow. According to one estimate, the flow of bilateral assistance for basic services - basic education, primary health, safe drinking water and sanitation, family planning and nutrition programmes - amounted in 1992 to roughly $4 billion (15 member countries of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation

and Development (OECD)), or 7 per cent of their total official development assistance, with the corresponding figure for multilateral institutions being 16 per cent. Total official development assistance going to the 10 countries with the highest number of poor people, accounting for some two thirds of the world's poor, was estimated in 1992 at $17 per capita. At this level the impact of development assistance on the incidence of poverty can at best be marginal. Hence there is an urgent need to raise the flow of assistance that goes more or less directly to support anti-poverty and related employment and social development programmes.

50. A specific proposal referred to in the Copenhagen Programme of Action which commands some support is the 20/20 compact whereby interested developing countries would allocate 20 per cent of their national budgets to programmes to meet basic human needs and interested donor partners would allocate 20 per cent of aid budgets for corresponding programmes. A recent meeting between donor countries and programme countries, hosted by the Government of Norway, helped to develop this idea further in terms of definitions and modalities for implementation. Specific commitments regarding the 20/20 compact were made by several countries.

51. From the United Nations, support at the country level is being provided by several agencies, funds and programmes, including the United Nations Development Programme, to a range of activities in connection with the development of national strategies for poverty eradication, including research, policy dialogue, formulation and implementation. In furtherance of chapter V of the Plan of Action of the Social Summit and Assembly resolution 50/120 on operational activities for development, great emphasis is being placed on improved coordination at the country level through the resident coordinator system and on UNDP's role in organizing the efforts of the United Nations system towards capacity-building at all levels and its support of coordinated implementation of social development programmes through its network of field offices. As far as inter-agency mechanisms are concerned, the setting up of task forces by ACC is a valuable example of how the system can be coordinated in providing guidelines, particularly on poverty eradication, at the country level which draws upon the policy outcome of recent conferences. This provides an integrated and harmonious United Nations-system approach in support of country-level follow-up.

52. An important change that is required is the shift from a project to programme approach. Since donor resources are but a small part of what is required for poverty eradication and social development, a project-based approach to development assistance leads perhaps to a few sporadic showcase examples. To be effective, development assistance has to be a part of national priorities and national efforts. This is in a sense what a programme approach would seek to do. In addition a programme approach would facilitate a range of interventions - for instance, in education, health care etc., which would reinforce each other.

53. The implementation of a programme approach would be greatly facilitated by the integrated strategies for poverty eradication that all countries are to formulate as part of the commitment under the Copenhagen Programme of Action. The responses of Governments to the request of the Secretary-General to

designate a focal point for the follow-up to the Social Summit and their activities relating to the eradication of poverty in the context of the International Year suggest that this process is already under way.

54. Development cooperation for social and poverty programmes has confronted problems particular to the subject areas. These problems may be summarized under three headings:

(a) Diffused responsibility within Governments for social and anti-poverty programmes;

(b) Weak status of ministries of social affairs in many countries;

(c) Changing donor priorities and complex donor procedures.

55. The formulation of integrated strategies, including a gender perspective, would to a certain extent help to coordinate the work of various departments involved in poverty reduction. It would also provide a vehicle for coordinating donor support. In order for this to happen, these integrated strategies formulated by the programme countries themselves should become the centrepiece of the donor programme country dialogue.

56. Social development tends to have a long-term focus, and the benefits are often intangible. Donor agencies typically have shorter planning horizons and wish to see not only more immediate but also more tangible results. Greater attention needs to be given to how these contradictions can be reconciled.

57. Development assistance is often used to test new approaches and solutions. Pilot projects tend to be expert-intensive and thus expensive. More attention needs to be given, at all stages of project design, to ensuring that they lend themselves to wide replication at much lower unit cost. More attention also needs to be given, in both developing and donor countries, to ensuring that projects can become self-supporting after donor support ceases. Thus, in deciding investments in the social area, both parties need to consider more carefully the maintenance costs involved and the sources of funds for recurrent expenses, especially for staffing. At the same time, programmes can be supported more effectively with a more flexible approach to meeting local and recurrent costs, which tend to be particularly significant in the social area.

58. Current donor procedures are often time-consuming. They place a heavy burden on personnel in developing countries, which ministries of social affairs or welfare especially find difficult to shoulder. Efforts need to be made to streamline bureaucratic procedures, bearing in mind the need for appropriate public accountability, so that the dialogue between cooperating countries can focus on the substance of activities.

Notes

1/ Report of the International Conference on Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995 (A/CONF.166/9), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

2/ See General Assembly resolution 48/183.

3/ See General Assembly resolution 50/107.

4/ Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, vol. I, Resolutions Adopted by the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8), resolution 1, annex II.

5/ Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994 (A/CONF.171/13 and Add.1), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

6/ See General Assembly resolution 43/181.

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REVIEW OF THE FUNCTIONING OF THE COMMISSION

Proposals for the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001

Note by the Secretary-General

1. The Secretary-General is in the process of preparing his proposals for the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001. In accordance with programme planning regulation 4.2,

> "The medium-term plan shall be a translation of legislative mandates into programmes. Its objectives and strategies shall be derived from the policy orientations and goals set by the intergovernmental organs. It shall reflect Member States' priorities as set out in legislation adopted by functional and regional intergovernmental bodies within their spheres of competence and by the General Assembly, on advice from the Committee for Programme and Coordination. In this context, subsidiary intergovernmental and expert bodies should, accordingly, refrain from making recommendations on the relative priorities of the major programmes as outlined in the medium-term plan and should instead propose, through the Committee, the relative priorities to be accorded to the various subprogrammes within their respective fields of competence. The medium-term plan should clearly identify new activities."

2. Regulation 4.16 states that:

> "Intergovernmental and expert bodies shall, when reviewing the relevant chapters of the proposed medium-term plan, recommend priorities among

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subprogrammes in their field of competence. They shall refrain from making recommendations on priority among major programmes. The Committee for Programme and Coordination, when making recommendations, and the Secretary-General, when making proposals on programme priorities, shall take into account the views of the above-mentioned bodies."

3. The attention of the Commission is also drawn to regulation 4.15 which states that:

"... priorities shall be based on the importance of the objective to Member States, the Organization's capacity to achieve it and the real effectiveness and usefulness of the results."

4. As a result of decisions by the General Assembly on the form and structure of the medium-term plan, sections of the plan which in previous plans were classified as programmes are now termed "subprogrammes". For the review of the Commission, this note presents the overall narrative of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development and the draft narrative of the subprogramme on social development.

Programme 5. Policy coordination and sustainable development

5. The overall orientation of the programme is to facilitate better integration and coordination of the work of the United Nations in the economic and social sphere by providing support to the central policy-making bodies and coordination processes on the various aspects of development. The mandate for the programme derives from the secretariat responsibility to provide support to the General Assembly, in particular its Second and Third Committees, the Economic and Social Council and relevant subsidiary bodies, relevant resolutions concerning international economic cooperation, and resolutions on the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields, including, in particular, General Assembly resolution 47/212 on the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations, as well as from relevant aspects of the mandate of the Secretary-General, including his responsibilities as the Chairman of the Administrative Committee on Coordination.

6. The programme is under the responsibility of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development.

7. The work of the Department helps Member States to develop agreed standards, policies and programmes on issues arising from globalization of environmental and social problems and from the marginalization of certain disadvantaged groups. It also deals with certain aspects of democratization like the advancement of women and the involvement of new global actors, such as members of civil society, in the policy-making and standard-setting initiatives of the international community.

8. By the end of the period covered by the plan, it is expected that the Department would have accomplished the following:

(a) Strengthened the role of the Organization as a forum for debate and consensus-building in the economic and social spheres;

(b) Provided effective support to standing political processes and relevant ad hoc processes for the development of integrated and coordinated policy responses to development issues and to emerging global problems; for the negotiation of global agreements on norms, standards and cooperative actions; and for the enhancement of the effectiveness of operational activities for development;

(c) Promoted and monitored, as appropriate, the implementation of agreed plans, strategies, programmes or platforms for action, including the outcome of United Nations conferences for which the Department has responsibility;

(d) Enhanced policy coherence and coordination both within the United Nations and amongst United Nations system organizations;

(e) Strengthened linkages between the United Nations and civil society and developed innovative means of cooperation and modes of partnership in areas of common interest, including operational activities for development at the country level;

(f) Increased awareness of United Nations work in the economic and social spheres and related fields.

Subprogramme 5.3 Social development

9. The subprogamme, which is implemented by the Division for Social Policy and Development, will seek to strengthen international cooperation for social development, with particular attention to the three core issues of poverty eradication, employment generation and social integration, in the context of the comprehensive and detailed framework of commitments and policies for action by Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations provided by the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the 1995 World Summit for Social Development.

10. More specifically, the objectives of the subprogramme are:

(a) To facilitate intergovernmental dialogue on social issues and trends and their policy implications in support of the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. The subprogramme will promote common norms, policies and cooperative actions aimed at facilitating the realization in an integrated manner of the Social Summit objectives, and develop integrated approaches to issues that cut across the economic, social and cultural domains, with particular emphasis on the contribution to social cohesion of policies to reduce poverty and generate employment. The subprogramme will also contribute to the efforts by the United Nations system for the eradication of poverty, in the context of both the Social Summit objectives and activities related to the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006);

(b) To promote the implementation and to coordinate the preparation and monitoring of United Nations declarations and programmes of action relevant to

social development, such as the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, the World Plan of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond and the International Year for Older Persons in 1999. These activities relate principally to the integration into society of groups which, because of their vulnerability or lack of power, are not fully participating in the life of the community;

(c) To strengthen participation of and cooperation among all actors concerned with social development (Governments at all levels, all elements of civil society and the private sector) in promoting national objectives and internationally agreed norms.

ANNEX

Legislative mandates

Subprogramme 5.3 Social development

General Assembly resolutions: 37/51 International Plan of Action on Ageing; 37/52 World Programme of Action for Disabled Persons; 44/66 Monitoring of information on effective measures and alternative methods of implementing plans, strategies and programmes of action in the social field at the national level; 45/199 International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade; 46/91 Implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing and related activities; 48/96 Standard Rules for the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities; 49/155 The role of cooperatives in the light of new economic and social trends; 50/161 Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action); 50/81 (annex) World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond; 50/107 International Year and Decade for the Eradication of Poverty; 50/141 International Year of Older Persons: towards a society for all ages; 50/144 Follow-up to the Standard Rules and Long-term Strategy in favour of Disabled Persons.